

# Breaking the Cycle of Divorce: Religious and Cultural Mediation by *Kyai-Imams* in Coastal Muslim Communities in Rembang and Melaka

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**Abstract:** This research endeavours to critically examine the role of cultural mediation by *Kyai* and *Imam* in mitigating the incidence of divorce within coastal Muslim communities in Rembang and Melaka. It seeks to understand how these religious leaders influence social dynamics and foster community cohesion, stabilizing familial relationships in these regions. The research used a qualitative approach with interview methods with religious leaders, community members, and legal professionals to identify the social, religious, and legal roles of *Kyai* and *Imam* as mediators in family conflicts. The findings reveal that *Kyai* and *Imam* are crucial in guiding troubled couples through domestic conflict by integrating religious teachings and formal legal regulations. *Kyai* and *Imams* provide spiritual advice and authoritative figures capable of providing practical solutions to resolving family problems. However, challenges related to accessibility to formal mediation and the limitations of informal mediation point to the need for strengthened integration between religious patronage and the state legal system. The study concludes that *Kyai* and *Imam* patronage significantly reduces divorce rates. However, closer collaboration between the formal legal and faith-based mediation mechanisms is needed to increase effectiveness. This study offers a fresh perspective on the connections among religion, legal systems, and family mediation within Muslim communities.

**Keywords:** cultural mediation, divorce, *kyai* and *imam*, rembang and melaka, coastal muslim

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## A. Introduction

Religious leaders' (*ulama*) patronage in coastal regions in Indonesia and Malaysia is deeply intertwined with the historical context as pivotal international trade hubs. The strategic positioning of Rembang (Indonesia) and Melaka (Malaysia) facilitated cross-cultural exchanges and interactions that contributed to establishing and evolving religious authority and influence within these regions. Thus, the historical legacy of *ulama* patronage reflects a complex interplay between religion, trade, and local governance in maritime Southeast Asia. Since the time of significant Southeast Asian empires like Majapahit in Indonesia and the Sultanate of Melaka in Malaysia, these coastal areas have served as crucial stopping points for merchants from diverse regions, including Gujarat and the Middle East (Hoogervorst, 2021). Both areas served as convergence zones for various cultures and religions, developing complex and deeply embedded social ties.

A study by Anthony Reid highlights the significant impact of trade history in Southeast Asia on social structures. It reveals how the patronage of religious leaders became a vital component in the dynamics between traders, local communities, and prevailing power structures. This interplay helped shape the region's sociopolitical landscape (Reid, 2017). This patronage was not solely religious but also created a reciprocal social bond between the *ulama* and the coastal communities, with the *ulama* serving as authoritative figures mediating various social issues, including family disputes.

The introduction of Islam in these coastal regions brought significant spiritual transformations. Additionally, it changed the existing social and legal frameworks by establishing religious leaders as key mediators in social disputes. As Geoffrey Wade noted, Islam significantly influenced the social transformation of coastal areas, with the *ulama* serving as key intermediaries, especially in settling family conflicts (Wade, 2009). In both regions, *ulama* functioned as disseminators of religious teachings and as figures integrating Islamic law with local social norms. Thus, this patronage of *ulama* served not only in a religious context but also as a profound social structure, forming a patron-client relationship that intertwined the *ulama* and the communities they served (Firdous, Maryam and Kasi, 2023).

Azyumardi Azra noted that in coastal areas, *ulama* is significant in linking religious law and local traditions, creating a legal system that draws from Islamic teachings and local customs and practices (Azra, 2004). In the Rembang area, the *ulama* are frequently perceived as more trustworthy mediators than traditional legal avenues. This perception significantly influences the community's reliance on

their guidance and mediation in various matters. A similar phenomenon can be observed in Melaka, a major global trading center in the 15th and 16th centuries. In Melaka, the *Tok Penghulu*, also called the *Imam*, mediates familial disputes. This role involves facilitating conflict resolution by adhering to Islamic principles recognized and accepted by the local community. Through this mediation process, the *Tok Penghulu* is critical in maintaining social harmony and promoting reconciliation within families. According to Huzin Ali, the *Tok Penghulu* was respected and trusted to resolve family issues, including divorce, by integrating Islamic teachings with local Malay customs (Ali, 1968).

The mediation of family disputes in Indonesia and Malaysia is strongly influenced by the close relationship between Islamic law and local social norms (Mazroui, 2021). In Indonesia, this legal system is implemented through the Minister of Religion Regulation (Perma No 1 of 2016) regarding Mediation Procedures. The stipulated framework necessitates engagement in mediation as a preliminary measure for addressing familial disputes before advancing to the formal dissolution of marriage proceedings. Abdurrahman explains that mediation by *ulama* or religious figures is the preferred first step in resolving family conflicts due to the high level of trust placed in these figures (Abdurrahman, 1992).

Similarly, in Malaysia, a similar legal framework is outlined in Section 47, Part V of the Islamic Family Law (Federal Territories) Act 303, 1984, which mandates that mediation must be conducted by appointed officials, including *Imams* or *Tok Penghulu* before a divorce can proceed. The role of the *Tok Penghulu* in mediating family disputes tends to be perceived as more authoritative and trustworthy than that of formal legal institutions. This preference highlights the significant influence of religious figures within the community, positioning them as key mediators in conflict resolution. (Saifullah, 2023). However, despite the important role of the *ulama* as an informal actor in strengthening these regulations, much of the formal legal scholarship focuses on legislation aspects.

This phenomenon of *ulama* patronage can be further analyzed using social theories such as the Patron-Client Theory, which describes the reciprocal relationship between *ulama* as patrons and the community as clients. Gellner suggested that in societies dependent on authority figures, *ulama* serve as mediators and stabilizers of social order (Gellner, 1989). At the same time, Conflict Resolution Theory is also relevant in explaining how religious values, particularly Islam, are used by *ulama* to resolve family disputes. Fisher and Ury argue that value-based mediation can yield more acceptable solutions for all parties involved (Fisher, Ury and Patton, 2011).

Previous studies on the role of *ulama* and *Tok Penghulu* in mediating family conflicts in Indonesia and Malaysia reveal a significant gap in the existing literature, particularly regarding the connection between *ulama* patronage and family law regulations. Research by Harun Rasyid et al. highlights the role of *ulama* as mediators in family disputes in the Kepulauan Seribu. However, it does not delve into the relationship between *ulama* patronage and family law regulations (Rasyid et al., 2023). Similarly, Maznah Mohamad's study on the role of *Tok Penghulu* in Malaysia's family dispute mediation does not include a socio-historical dimension that links *ulama* patronage with family law practices (Mohamad & Mohamad, 2020). Nasrul et al.'s comparative study on Islamic law-based mediation practices in Indonesia and Malaysia notably examines how *ulama* patronage might enhance the regulatory framework surrounding family mediation (Nasrul et al., 2024). Collectively, these scholarly works suggest that while the involvement of *ulama* in the mediation of family disputes is a topic that has garnered considerable discourse, a scarcity of research directly correlating this involvement with the existing family law regulations exists.

This gap is crucial to address due to the rich and strengthened existing family law policies through a deeper understanding of the role of *ulama* patronage in family law regulations. Should this gap persist, the function of *ulama* as informal mediators may be neglected in formal legislative processes, even though they play a vital role in fostering social stability and familial unity within coastal communities. This research aims to fill this void by integrating the analysis of *ulama* patronage in strengthening family conflict mediation regulations. The importance of this research stems not just from its theoretical implications but also from its potential to affect social and legal policies in both nations. A comprehensive understanding of the *ulama's* role is essential for enhancing the family mediation system, ensuring it is more inclusive and grounded in the community's local values.

## B. Methods

This study employs a comparative qualitative approach to examine the role of *ulama* patronage in family conflict mediation in Rembang, Indonesia, and Melaka, Malaysia. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants. In Rembang, interviews were conducted with *Kyai* of Pondok Zumrotu Thalibin and Informant (fishermen). The interview with *Kyai* aimed to understand the role of the *ulama* in family mediation. In contrast, interviews with the fishermen provided insights into the influence of patronage in their social lives. In Melaka, interviews were conducted with coastal community members and the *Imam* of Kampung Nelayan Bukit Punggur.

The focus of these interviews was to explore the role of religion in resolving family disputes and the community's preference for informal mediation. Additionally, data triangulation was carried out through an interview with academics from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Melaka and lawyers from the Syariah Court of Melaka.

The study utilizes the Patron-Client Theory to illustrate the mutually beneficial relationship between *ulama* patrons and the community as clients. Conflict Resolution Theory is also applied to understand how religion-based mediation can alleviate tensions in family conflicts. Data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns in the role of the *ulama* in family mediation and the socio-cultural influences shaping the patron-client relationship.

## C. Results and Discussion

### Divorce Rates Among Muslim Coastal Communities in Rembang and Melaka

The divorce rate in coastal areas of Indonesia, particularly in Rembang, is relatively low compared to the rising divorce trends in other regions. According to data released by Indonesia's Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the year 2022 recorded over 516,000 divorce cases, signifying a substantial increase of 15.31% compared to the preceding year. This trend highlights a noteworthy escalation in divorce within the Indonesian context, necessitating further investigation into the underlying social and economic factors contributing to this rise (BPS Kabupaten Rembang, 2024). This data underscores significant concerns about family resilience in Indonesia, particularly in coastal areas dealing with intricate economic and social challenges. The divorce rate in Rembang does not match the elevated levels observed in other coastal regions of Indonesia.

Recent data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Rembang indicates that despite a relatively high divorce trend, only around 20% of marriages ended in divorce in 2022. This figure is significantly lower than in other areas, such as Cilacap, Banyumas, and Purbalingga in Central Java, which report considerably higher divorce rates. Furthermore, compared to data from the Rembang Population and Civil Registration Office in 2019, the divorce rate was only 1.81% of the total marriages (Kemenag Rembang, 2022). The statistical data indicates that while Rembang exhibits a higher divorce rate than rural areas, it remains comparatively low compared to other coastal regions.

The factor that may elucidate the low divorce rate in Rembang is the role of *Kyai* and local religious leaders in mediating family conflicts. Religious leaders in

Rembang often serve as authoritative figures. They have the capability of providing advice and solutions to couples facing marital issues. Drawing on religious doctrines and societal expectations, this mediation approach is frequently more successful in reducing divorce rates, especially in regions where formal mediation services are not readily available. In Rembang, the *Kyai* and other religious authorities mediate between couples experiencing difficulties and the formal legal system, thereby decreasing the probability of divorce (Hidayatullah, 2024).

In a similar context, Melaka, Malaysia, experiences a situation where divorce rates have risen. The divorce rate in coastal regions such as Bukit Punggur remains relatively lower than the national average. Official statistical reports from the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) show a significant increase in divorce rates in 2022, reaching 46% (DOSM, 2022). The *Imams* in Melaka, who have strong connections with the local communities, play a vital role in promoting family stability. They frequently step in to provide religious guidance and assist in family mediation, which helps enhance family resilience in the face of socio-economic challenges.

The patronage system employed by *Kyai* in Rembang and *Imams* in Melaka significantly impacts the low divorce rates, even when faced with high social and economic pressures in coastal areas. The informal mediation model utilized by religious leaders offers solutions that are more accessible and pertinent to the local community's needs. This approach is characterized by a significant level of trust from individuals regarding familial matters, as these leaders are perceived to hold greater authority and possess a deeper understanding of local values and religious practices. Consequently, their involvement in mediation is often regarded as a legitimate and culturally resonant alternative to formal legal mechanisms.

### **The Patronage of *Kyai* in Muslim Coastal Communities of Rembang**

The Patron-Client Theory, developed by sociologists such as Eisenstadt and Roniger, describes the patron-client relationship as an asymmetric social system where a patron (a leader or authority figure) provides protection or assistance to a client (a community member) in exchange for loyalty or support (Eisenstadt & Roniger, 1980). In the Rembang community, *Kyai* serves as a spiritual advisor and an active social mediator in resolving complex family issues. However, there are considerable challenges regarding accessibility to formal mediators, which limits the effectiveness of *Kyai*'s role in resolving all types of family conflicts. In the context of Rembang, the *Kyai* act as patrons who provide religious advice and serve as mediators for the community in addressing social issues, including family conflicts.

In this regard, *Kyai* extends beyond that of a spiritual leader to becoming an authoritative figure with the power to make decisions in domestic affairs. *Kyai* Zumrotu Thalibin's statement emphasizes this role:

"We always educate the community on the importance of maintaining family harmony in our studies at the Pesantren. When there are problems, many come to the pesantren to get our opinion, even when the issue cannot be resolved solely through religious advice" (Interview with Informant *Kyai* Zumrotu Thalibin)

This interview reflects how patronage functions in providing more holistic solutions. The community, especially in coastal areas that are difficult to reach by formal institutions, tends to entrust their issues to the *Kyai* due to their respected status as authoritative figures in resolving conflicts (Khakim & Satibi, 2023).

However, the theory also highlights the client's dependency on the patron, which may limit the development of more formal institutions. In Rembang, although the *Kyai* significantly reduces divorce rates, the community's dependence on the *Kyai* suggests a lack of trust in formal institutions or difficulties in accessing mediation services. It aligns with Eisenstadt and Roniger's argument that patron-client relationships can restrict the development of formal institutions if the patron is too dominant in social life (Eisenstadt & Roniger, 1984). Furthermore, this Patron-Client theory shows that the role of the *Kyai* fills the void left by formal institutions that are insufficiently present in coastal communities, particularly with minimal access to formal mediation or legal services.

On the other hand, Conflict Resolution Theory, developed by figures such as John Burton, emphasizes the importance of effective communication and emotional management in resolving conflicts (Burton, 1991). This theory also underscores the importance of a more humanistic approach in conflict mediation, which addresses legal issues and considers the conflicting parties' psychological and emotional dimensions (Burton, 1990). In Rembang, the *Kyai* adopts this approach to resolving family issues, including preventing divorce through counseling and more humane advice. The Informant (fisherman) stated:

"We often come to the *Kyai* if we have family problems. He provides messages and advice on the religious values of marriage to help us, who are in conflict, avoid rushing into divorce" (Interview with Informant Tulis, 2024).

This approach reflects a consensus-based method emphasizing the importance of relationships and understanding between spouses. The *Kyai*, as a social mediator, not only conducts as a spiritual advisor but also as a mediator who seeks to reduce emotional tension and encourages couples to find mutual solutions. In the realm of

Conflict Resolution Theory, the actions of the *Kyai* can be understood as an endeavour to establish a "win-win solution" that benefits both parties involved. The *Kyai* transcends a solely religious approach by advocating for resolving marital disputes through dialogue and understanding, thus promoting reconciliation over divorce, which is frequently regarded as a last resort. This approach underscores the importance of addressing emotional and spiritual dimensions of conflict to foster sustainable resolutions. This method reflects John Burton's standpoint, highlighting the necessity of addressing individuals' fundamental needs in resolving conflicts. The *Kyai* addresses couples' psychological and social needs, helping them feel appreciated and comprehended to prevent divorce.

However, challenges arise when family conflicts become more complex and require more formal resolution. Ali Anshori from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Rembang explained,

"Some cases require further handling by the authorities or professional mediators" (Interview with Informant Anshori, 2024)

The statement from the interview with Informant Anshori (2024) suggests that certain cases present complexities that exceed the capacity for resolution through informal or self-mediated approaches. It implies a need for structured intervention by authorities or professional mediators with the requisite training and expertise to navigate such intricacies. The necessity for such interventions may reflect broader systemic issues within the societal framework, indicating that simply empowering individuals to resolve conflicts independently may not be sufficient in all scenarios. Thus, the role of authorities and mediators becomes critical in restoring order, fostering dialogue, and ultimately, achieving just and sustainable resolutions. This stance aligns with contemporary theories in conflict resolution that advocate for tailored approaches based on each case's specific needs and dynamics.

The conflict resolution theory highlights the limitations of informal approaches in resolving more complicated conflicts that require intervention from legal institutions or professional mediation. The family conflict resolution involving *Kyai* demonstrates the limitations of informal approaches and emphasizes the need for a more formal and structured mediation system.

According to the researcher's observations, coastal communities such as Rembang see the *Kyai* functioning as mediators who draw on their spiritual authority and typically combine customary law with formal law to address family conflicts. It aligns with Friedmann's theory of law as a process, which asserts that law is not just a written norm but also a social product that evolves within society

(Friedman, 1975). In Rembang, *Kyai*'s role as a social mediator can be seen as strengthening mediation regulations involving customary and state law. *Kyai* is a bridge between tradition and formal regulation in addressing family conflicts. In interviews, *Kyai* mentioned that they offer advice based on religious teachings but suggest that couples consider legal aspects when resolving conflicts. It shows that *Kyai*'s role extends beyond the spiritual domain, introducing and reinforcing formal regulations such as Indonesia's Compilation of Islamic Law.

Family conflict resolution involving the *Kyai* reflects a broader strengthening of mediation regulations. The *Kyai* serves as an informal mediator who addresses conflicts using spiritual methods and as a facilitator connecting the community with more established legal systems, including customary and state law. It aligns with Friedmann's statement that law can develop flexibly within society, adapting to the needs and dynamics of the local social context (Friedman, 1969). However, the Informant (fisherman) interviewed pointed out:

"We live far from the city, and it is difficult to find a mediator who can help. So, we resolve our issues by coming to the *Kyai*" (Interview with Informant Tulis, 2024)

This limitation reflects the accessibility issues often faced by coastal communities, which are hindered not only by physical distance but also by a lack of information and facilities. In this case, Talcott Parsons' Social System Theory offers a relevant perspective. Parsons emphasizes integrating different social systems to create societal harmony (Parsons, 1972). The *Kyai* acts as a mediator between the formal legal system and the more traditional social system of the community. However, challenges arise when traditional social systems, such as the patron-client system, conflict with the need to access a more structured formal legal system. These challenges highlight that although *Kyai*'s patronage has proven effective in some areas, accessibility to formal institutions and resolving more complex conflicts remain barriers that must be addressed.

### **The Patronage of *Kyai* in Muslim Coastal Communities of Melaka**

The low divorce rate in Melaka compared to other regions in Malaysia is closely related to the role of religion in shaping public perceptions of marriage as worship. It is emphasized by Informant Othman from UiTM Melaka:

"Here, we are taught from the beginning that marriage is not merely about living together, but about seeking the pleasure of Allah" (Interview with Informant Othman, 2024)

The statement from Informant Othman underscores a significant philosophical and theological perspective regarding marriage within the context discussed. It emphasizes that the institution of marriage transcends the mere practicalities of cohabitation, positioning it instead as a spiritual endeavour focused on attaining divine approval and pleasure. This viewpoint reflects a broader cultural and religious understanding where the sanctity of marriage is intertwined with moral and spiritual objectives. Such a perspective suggests that the motivations behind marriage include personal fulfilment and companionship and a commitment to align one's actions with religious principles. This understanding may influence the expectations and responsibilities of marital relationships in this context, thereby shaping the dynamics between partners and their commitments to one another and their faith.

Marriage is considered a worldly relationship and devotion to God, encouraging couples to sustain their households. This perspective leads to the understanding that divorce is not the first choice but rather an attempt to solve marital problems. One important aspect that reinforces these values is the role of the *Imam* in family conflict mediation in Melaka, particularly the *Imam* of Kampung Nelayan Bukit Punggur. As stated by Informant Encik Nazien, a local *Imam*,

"If there is a major problem in a family, the community usually comes to me first. I try to provide advice so that they can resolve their issues without resorting to divorce" (Interview with Informant Nazien, 2024)

This statement demonstrates that Melaka's people consider the *Imam* a spiritual guide and a highly respected social mediator in resolving family problems. The *Imam* functions as a key figure linking religious values with resolving everyday problems, especially when these issues involve family life, which is central to the community's social structure (Kahar & Hasbullah, 2022).

In the Patron-Client theory developed by Eisenstadt and Roniger, the patron-client relationship depicts social interaction in which a patron provides protection, assistance, or advice to a client for loyalty and social support (Eisenstadt & Roniger, 1980). The role of the *Imam* extends beyond the traditional boundaries of religious leadership, positioning the *Imam* as a significant patron who offers multiple layers of protection through the provision of religious, moral, and social counsel. This role is particularly salient in high-pressure contexts, such as familial conflicts, where the *Imam* assumes the dual function of spiritual guide and trusted mediator.

The importance of this role is highlighted by various community members, including Informant Encik Arif, a mosque administrator in the coastal region, who emphasizes the need for collaborative solutions in addressing these challenges.

"When there is domestic violence, we always try to remind the couple to return to religious teachings and maintain the sanctity of the marriage. My parents' marriage lasted 35 years because they never missed their five daily prayers" (Informant Encik Arif, 2024)

This advice underscores the importance of religion as a moral guide in maintaining marital harmony, even when the issues at hand appear to be very serious. In this case, the *Imam* serves as an intermediary between the conflicting parties and as an educator who emphasizes the significance of preserving the sanctity of marriage through an approach rooted in religious and moral values. This approach reinforces family stability in society, a crucial component of the social structure in Melaka.

The importance of the *Imam*'s role in family conflict mediation can also be understood through the lens of Conflict Resolution Theory, developed by John Burton. Burton believes effective communication and emotional management are key to resolving conflicts (Burton, 1991). In the context of the mediation carried out by the *Imam* in Melaka, the approach used is more humanistic and consensus-based, aiming to reduce emotional tension between couples facing conflict. The *Imam* strives to create a conducive environment where both parties can express their feelings and needs and find mutually acceptable solutions without resorting to divorce as a way out (Burton, 1990). As *Imam* Nazien stated, people tend to approach the *Imam* first when facing significant problems because they believe the *Imam* can offer guidance based on religious teachings and in ways that consider each party's psychological and emotional well-being.

This consensus-based approach is highly relevant to Burton's theory, which emphasizes that good conflict resolution does not focus solely on the interests of the more powerful party but also on meeting the basic needs of all those involved (Ríos & Fisher, 2024).

The *Imam* serves as a mediator who aims to fulfil the psychological needs of both parties, including the need for respect, understanding, and acceptance, which can ultimately help avert a divorce. While the *Imam* in Melaka is greatly esteemed as a mediator, in more intricate situations, such as those involving domestic violence or legal infractions, the *Imam* typically directs the parties to pursue further resolution through the Qadhi or other formal institutions (Kholis, Alwi and Suci, 2021). It shows

that religious and moral-based approaches play an important role in resolving many family issues; sometimes, a more structured formal intervention is necessary to handle more complicated problems.

The connection between the Patron-Client theory and Conflict Resolution theory, along with the *Imam*'s role in Melaka, underscores that the social role of the *Imam* is not limited to spiritual matters. The *Imam* also functions as a bridge connecting local traditions and formal regulations to resolve family problems. On the one hand, the *Imam* helps strengthen the social structure through a religion-based approach to maintain social cohesion and family harmony. On the other hand, when facing more complex problems, the *Imam* may refer individuals to the *Qadhi*, who serves as a higher authoritative figure within Malaysia's Islamic legal system, to ensure that conflict resolution meets more formal and structured legal rules (Ali, 2024).

Furthermore, the strengthening of the social structure in Melaka society can also be seen through Talcott Parsons' Social Systems theory. Parsons emphasized integrating different social systems to create harmony and stability (Parsons, 1969). The *Imam* is an agent who links and integrates religious values with formal legal systems and the local social systems in the community. As a mediator, the *Imam* relies on religious teachings and is important in integrating local social norms with Islamic law in Malaysia and the national legal system (Ibrahim, 2020).

However, the main challenge faced by the *Imam* in their role as social mediators is limited access to resources. As several sources have revealed, although the acceptance of the *Imam*'s role within the community is high, there are still challenges in accessing formal legal assistance outside of the religious framework. Some members of society, especially in remote areas, face difficulties gaining access to formal institutions such as the *Qadhi* or the courts (Muro, 2022). It highlights the importance of closer integration between the *Imam*'s role and formal institutions in handling family cases that require more in-depth resolution.

In this regard, strengthening the social structure through *Imam* mediation impacts divorce reduction and shows great potential in creating social stability within the community. The *Imam* in Melaka significantly strengthens the social and family structure through an approach based on religious and moral values. However, to enhance its effectiveness, closer collaboration with formal legal institutions and improved access for the community to formal mediation services are necessary to address more complex cases requiring further intervention.

## D. Conclusion

This study reveals the crucial role of the patronage system of *Kyai* in Rembang, Indonesia, and *Imam* in Melaka, Malaysia, in strengthening mediation regulations for divorce mitigation within the coastal Muslim communities. Through a qualitative approach involving interviews with religious leaders, community members, and legal professionals, the study demonstrates that *Kyai* and *Imam* function as spiritual advisors and social mediators with the authority to resolve marital conflicts. They play a central role in integrating religious teachings, customary law, and formal legal regulations in family problem-solving, employing a more holistic approach due to the community's limited access to formal mediation institutions.

The patronage system employed by the *Kyai* and *Imam* highlights the importance of patron-client relationships within coastal societies. The *Kyai* and *Imam* serve as authoritative figures in the spiritual realm and as intermediaries between the community and the more formal legal systems, albeit within certain limitations. They offer more practical and culturally appropriate solutions that are easily accessible to the coastal population, which is often hindered by distance and limited access to formal legal institutions. It significantly contributes to reducing divorce rates within their communities. The findings also indicate that resolving family conflicts through the patronage of *Kyai* and *Imam* extends beyond legal and religious aspects, focusing on the psychological and social dimensions of the conflicting parties. This more humanistic approach aligns with Conflict Resolution Theory, which emphasizes the importance of emotional management and the search for joint solutions. As mediators, the *Kyai* and *Imam* prioritize understanding and communication to create a "win-win solution" that avoids divorce and strengthens marital relationships.

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